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## EDGAR GARDNER MURPHY: AN APPRECIATION\*

Among those whose preparation for life was most closely associated with Sewanee, none, I think, has come nearer attaining national character than Edgar Gardner Murphy. Testimony to this has been abundantly given by those who were with him in the field of his active service. My own contribution can be made only from within,—from personal association with the man himself.

Edgar Murphy appeared first at Sewanee from West Texas in 1885, at the early age of sixteen. The impression of him at that time was that of a prematurely thoughtful boy, who had begun early to take himself and life very seriously. Associating with much older fellow-students, he was not long in establishing a right to his inclusion among them on terms of equality. At that time, as in his later development, he combined in an unusual degree the outward and the inward,—the actual and practical, with the speculative and reflective.

As a pupil I found him both sympathetic and critical. However receptive he might be at any time of my thought, he never failed to return it to me as much his own as mine. Among the influences that first drove me into publication I recall none

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\*EDITOR'S NOTE.—In connection with Dr. DuBose's "Appreciation," the following facts in regard to Edgar Gardner Murphy's career may be of interest: Born in Fort Smith, Arkansas, August 31, 1869, he studied in the University of the South during the years 1885 to 1889 and then spent one year at the General Theological Seminary. From 1890 to 1902 he was actively engaged in the ministry of the Protestant Episcopal Church. During this period he also found time to organize the Southern Society for the Consideration of Race Problems; and to act as Chairman of the Alabama Child Labor Committee. From 1901 to 1908 he was Secretary of the Southern Education Board; for a few years Vice-President of the Conference for Education in the South; and in 1904 organized the National Child Labor Committee. In this year he was granted the honorary degree of Master of Arts from Yale University, and in 1911 the University of the South awarded him the degree of D.C.L. He died in New York City June 23, 1913. The following books appeared from his pen: *Words for the Church*, 1896; *The Larger Life*, 1896; *Problems of the Present South*, 1904; *The Basis of Ascendancy*, 1909; and *A Beginner's Star-Book* (published under the pseudonym of Kelvin McKready), 1912.

more vividly than a certain most forceful letter from Edgar Murphy soon after his leaving Sewanee. There are many of my old pupils to whom I love to make acknowledgment: that I have ever published a volume was their doing as well as mine.

At the earliest canonical age he was ordained to the sacred ministry. During the next twelve years he held important charges in West Texas, Ohio, New York, and Alabama. During all this period I corresponded with him and read his occasional publications,—not only sermons addressed to his congregations, but papers on many subjects addressed to a wide public. In his last parish, at Montgomery, his interest was specially aroused on two great problems—the industrial problem, and the racial problem of the South; and as rector of a large parish with absorbing duties, he nevertheless found time and strength to organize the first great conference for the study of race problems, and to throw himself into the fight for child-labor legislation.

Then, in the midst of the successful and wholly acceptable charge of one of the most prominent congregations in the South, he resigned his rectorate to become Secretary of the Southern Education Board; and two years later his many friends and admirers were astounded and distressed by his withdrawal from the ministry of the Church.

What had happened in his inner life to lead to that step? We who followed him afterward could see that with Murphy himself there was no giving up either of his Christianity or of his ministry. He broke the trammels of what he felt to be limitations and restrictions in the ministry, in order to exercise that same ministry in a feer, more active, more needful way. He believed that the Christian ministry while ever keeping its mind upon eternal principles, should put its hands deeper down than it was doing into temporal and prevalent practice.

A very particular incident was sufficient with him to lead up to large and general considerations. Perhaps the actual spark that fired him was the early beginning of discussion in the Alabama Legislature of the question of child labor. His activities both within his parish and without brought him more and more

to the study of general social conditions. The impulse was upon him to throw himself into the midst of the fight, and — rightly or wrongly — he felt he could not do so effectively within the limitations of the ministry of the Church.

His work brought him into close personal touch with leading men, north and south, engaged in a common cause of purest philanthropy, and involved him in the deeper and more vexed questions of race relations and complications,—an unsolved problem over all the world. The conviction and testimony of his fellow-workers was that he was becoming not merely the personal reformer, but the scientist, the philosopher, the statesman, the prophet of the coming social revolution. Let me try to interpret what it was in himself that fitted him for this lofty mission.

Murphy had lived and exercised a ministry in many sections of our country; he was associated with persons and in causes fraternally Northern and Southern; but it was not due to that accident that he was national rather than sectional;—it was temperamentally impossible for him to be sectional. So, in dealing with the two races of the South, he was considering both, as profoundly and as wisely concerned for the one as for the other. He knew that it was even more necessary for the stronger that it should do justice than for the weaker that it should receive justice. Precisely the same principles he applied to all the seeming conflicts and actual disputes in the economic, industrial, and business interests of men. The claim for him, based on his papers and addresses, upon his published works, but even more upon the personal judgment of his associates, was this:—that he dealt with these great questions not theoretically but practically; not only practically but scientifically, not only scientifically but philosophically; and, finally not only as a philosopher but as a statesman. I would make an even further point in the statement of the claim and add:—that beyond all the others and inclusive of them, Mr. Murphy's attitude and action in all these great matters was truly, profoundly, and thoroughly Christian. In the lay eulogies to his memory it is recognized and testified that he brought into his civic labors not only the other benefits of his previous experience, but all the spiritual

wisdom and temper of a fruitful Christian ministry. It may be a very long time before the mind of Christ can be seen to be the wisdom and made the practice of the world, but every such career as that of Edgar Murphy brings that blessed consummation one step nearer.

He died at the age of forty-four; the last eight years of which were spent in retirement from active service. To see him at any moment of that time was to know that he was stricken with a mortal malady. But to be in touch with him, even occasional and brief, during this last period, afforded the final and fullest revelation of the man:— in his simple humanity as husband, father, and friend; as sage; and (in my heart I believe) as saint. He is not the least among those whom we shall account and enroll and commemorate as our “Worthies.”

WILLIAM PORCHER DUBOSE.

Sewanee, Tennessee.